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SUBJECT: ENGAGING MOLDOVA'S DIASPORA

REF: STATE 86401

11. Summary: Defining and identifying a "Moldovan Diaspora" according to the definitions of reftel is difficult. Moldovan communities abroad, which are as ethnically and linguistically mixed as at home, are still in the process of formation. These communities share largely economic links with their home country, sending remittances to their families. Even though they number up to a quarter of the country's roughly four million inhabitants, many Moldovans abroad are labor migrants who still intend to return home, rather than permanent emigres. Moldovans abroad rarely interact politically or institutionally with the home country, and voter turnout overseas was low in the recent elections. In a country that has existed in modern times for only 18 years, and which is the product of centuries of ethnic inflows, Moldovan national identity, even at home, is still under construction. End Summary.

Historical Ethnic Mixes Dilute Moldovan Identity

12. Once part of an independent principality of Moldavia, most of present-day Moldova was ruled by outside powers, including the Ottoman and Russian empires, Romania, and most recently, the Soviet Union. History thus endowed Moldova with a variegated ethnic mix, as its fertile soils and mild climate attracted succeeding waves of migrants from imperial centers. Russian control in the nineteenth century brought Orthodox Christian Bulgarian and Gagauz minorities fleeing the Ottoman Empire. Soviet population policies also brought in many Ukrainian and Russian migrants, and simultaneously spread ethnic Moldovans across the territories of the Soviet Union.

13. Thus, while its present majority consists of ethnic Moldovans, Moldova retains significant Ukrainian, Russian, Gagauz, Bulgarian and other minority populations. Ethnic "Moldovan" populations also exist in Ukraine, most inhabiting ancestral communities and not feeling any specific ties to Moldova. (Note: Romania does not see the inhabitants of its province of Moldavia as members of a separate ethnic group. End Note.) Some emigres who left their homeland before the breakup of the Soviet Union and Moldova's independence identify themselves as "Bessarabians."

Self-Identity Apart from the State

¶4. A Moldovan's national self-identity is not necessarily tied to the Moldovan state. Some Moldovan citizens see themselves as ethnically Romanian, while Ukrainians or Russians often do not self-identify themselves as Moldovan, but only as living or having lived in Moldova. Moldovan citizens often hold additional passports of the state that corresponds to their sense of nationality, including those of Romania, Bulgaria, Russia, Ukraine and increasingly Israel.

¶5. In one possible indication of a widespread lack of identification with the state, the numbers of expatriate Moldovans who vote in national elections at Moldovan consulates and embassies are low. In April and July 2009 parliamentary elections, fewer than 18,000 voters, out of roughly 36,000 on the lists, voted at Moldovan embassies and consulates. Even accounting for the difficulties of travel to diplomatic polling stations; concerns about revealing their presence to host-government authorities; and the inconvenience of the July 29 election day falling on a work day, these numbers compare poorly with the approximately 1.6 million (out of 2.5 to 2.7 million registered in April and July) who voted in Moldova itself.

Language Politics and Divided Loyalties

¶6. The uncertainty of identity is further demonstrated by Moldova's confused language

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politics. While the majority of Moldovans speak Romanian, Soviet policies promoted the myth of a distinct "Moldovan" language which, unlike Romanian, was written in the Cyrillic script. The Communist Party-led Government of Moldova (GOM) also has insisted that the "language of state" be identified as "Moldovan," so as to discourage identity with Romania (and has consistently tarred its enemies on the center-right as supporters of Romanian irredentism), while the pro-Romanian opposition parties insist that their language is called "Romanian."

¶7. Parliamentary elections on July 29 gave opposition parties a majority in Parliament, but not enough votes to elect a president. If the impasse is broken, and the four-party Alliance for European Integration gains full power, we can expect a relaxation of policies that drew a sharp distinction between the two subdialects. Such a change would more accurately reflect reality, because Moldovan linguistic discrepancies consist principally of small differences of pronunciation (adding a "y" sound before "e"), vocabulary (the occasional substitution of Russian words for their Romanian equivalents), and spelling (use of circumflexed "i" instead of circumflexed "a" to spell the same sound).

¶8. Thus, while the "language of state" has fostered a sense of nationhood among Moldovans, some Russian speakers and Communists have identified those who use it exclusively as loyal to Romania. Similarly, some Romanian speakers feel the same way about Russian speakers. Both languages have been used as political wedges, and as symbols of loyalty to foreign states. While most Moldovans speak Russian either as a first or more commonly a second language, a small minority would like to eliminate it entirely from the

public sphere. An estimated 20 percent of Moldovans either cannot speak Romanian, or use it at only the most basic level. Difficulties with linguistic self-identification extend to Moldovan communities living outside its borders.

Moldovan Diaspora

¶9. Moldova has significant numbers of its citizens living abroad, by some estimates as much as one third of its working age population, or a quarter of its actual population. Most of these migrants work in low-wage occupations with poor job security: according to a 2008 International Organization for Migration (IOM) report, estimates for 2006 show 46 percent working in construction, 19 percent in services, ten percent each in trade and transport, and the rest in agriculture, industry, and housekeeping. Because many of these migrants are undocumented, figures for migrants working in host countries are not available. Many are known to work either in Russia or Ukraine, as well as in Italy, Portugal, Spain, Israel and Turkey.

¶10. Communities of Moldovans also exist in the U.S., often centered on Pentecostal or Baptist Churches, though some of the Moldovans are part of Jewish emigre communities. New York City (predominantly Brighton Beach and Queens) is home to many of these mostly Jewish Moldovans who left either during the Soviet or post-Soviet period, while church-based communities have formed in Sacramento, California as well as throughout the Pacific Northwest and Atlantic Southern states. Significant church-based communities exist in Washington State in the Seattle-Tacoma and Spokane metropolitan areas, and in Portland, Oregon. Growth in such communities is also visible in the states of Illinois, Georgia and North Carolina.

¶11. Focusing on ethnic Moldovan communities, the following paragraphs are keyed to the questions posed in reftel:

-- (Question A) There are a number of non-governmental organizations representing Moldovans abroad, many focusing on Moldovan culture or political advocacy. A representative list may be

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gleaned from those organizations which signed an open letter requesting additional polling stations prior to the April 5, 2009, parliamentary elections: The Community of Bessarabian Romanians in USA (Phoenix, USA) (website: www.LaBordei.com); the Italia-Moldova Institute for Cooperation and Development (Trieste, Italy); the Association of the Moldovan Community in Ireland (Dublin, Ireland); the Fratia Association (Setubal, Portugal); the DOINA Socio-Cultural Association (Rome, Italy); Mondomigranti Newspaper (Bologna, Italy); Assomoldave-Associazione donne Moldave in Italia (Roma, Italy); the Moldova for Democracy and Development Foundation (New York, USA); The Moldova Foundation (Washington, USA); the Mihai Eminescu Socio-Cultural Association (Reggio Emilia, Italy); the Association of Moldovan Emigrants in USA (Tampa, USA); the Association of United Moldovan Communities (ACUM) Q COMUNISON (London, Great Britain); Moldovenii in Lume (Rome, Italy); the Moldova Cultural Association (Trento, Italy); and the Speranta Association (Torino, Italy). (Note: the Moldova Foundation in Washington DC, website

<http://foundation.moldova.org>, is headed by former Moldovan Embassy DCM Vlad Spanu; former U.S. Ambassador to Moldova John Todd Stewart serves on the Advisory Board. End Note.)

-- (Question B) Many Moldovans living abroad are economic migrants who provide direct support to their extended families. Until the recent economic crisis, remittances from employment abroad accounted for well over a third of Moldova's national GDP. However, aside from direct economic support to family members back home, it is not at all clear that there is a well developed sense of a shared ethnic or national identity, or some sense of a lost homeland. Most of these economic migrants have Moldovan citizenship, many own property in Moldova, and some return home either if they lose their jobs or, temporarily, if they wish to vote. It was the IOM, and not diaspora-based community organizations, which spearheaded "get out the vote" efforts in Moldovan communities abroad. (Note: Those Moldovans abroad who did vote in April and July parliamentary elections gave only 8.5 percent of their votes in both elections to the PCRM. The PCRM scored 49 and 44 percent, respectively, in Moldova. End Note.)

-- (Question C) The outgoing PCRM government in Moldova is not popular with much of the economic migrant population, who see it as responsible for their need to leave the country. Post has no information on the GOM's ability to influence either secular or religious diaspora communities. Admittedly, this may change with a peaceful transfer of power from the PCRM government to those parties which had until the July election been in the opposition. However, some of the church communities outside of Moldova are very active in attempting to provide assistance to social services such as orphanages or nursing homes in Moldova, usually in partnership with U.S. based missionary groups. Strikingly, Moldova does not appear to have a philanthropic infrastructure outside of that provided by religious groups.

-- (Question D) The current diaspora communities provide individual economic support to nuclear and extended family members. No concerted efforts to improve infrastructure, or to reinvest earned income in Moldovan projects, have been apparent among the Moldovan diaspora. In large part this may be caused by migrants' belief that social and government structures in Moldova are corrupt. (Note: any money inflows by diaspora members tend to go to purchase of consumer goods by supported relatives and to the construction of houses for use by relatives and returning emigres. End Note.) By contrast, Turkey does provide social and infrastructure support to the semi-autonomous Gagauz region in the south of Moldova, whose inhabitants speak a dialect of Turkish and emigrated to the region at least 200 years ago. As the development of Moldovan communities abroad is still in its formative stages, it is difficult to assess their potential in the future. If

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emigrants' perceptions of corruption and favoritism in Moldova change, and if they generate enough surplus income to make significant investments, significant investment could occur.

-- (Question E) The present diaspora communities are much more concerned with earning their daily bread than with scientific or institutional

development. While both in private conversations and in the press, Moldovans commonly declare the need for foreign investment, no similar statements about such investment have come from the diaspora. Moldovans are very positive about learning from the West through travel, work abroad, and study in Europe and the U.S., and hundreds of qualified Moldovan applicants go to the U.S. each year for academic studies. Approaching such applicants while they are in the U.S., or shortly after their return, may be the best way to involve them in science diplomacy programs. For the last three summers, Moldovan university students traveling to the United States on Summer Work and Travel (SWT) programs numbered 2,600 in 2009, 5,500 in 2008, and 5,000 in 2007. (Note: The drop in 2009 numbers was the result of fraudulent activities of numerous SWT sponsoring companies in 2008. End Note.) Moldovan SWT veterans who study science at university are possible participants in science diplomacy programs.

-- (Question F) Moldova endures a frozen conflict with the unrecognized break-away region of Transnistria, which separated from Moldova under Russian influence, after a 1992 ceasefire halted hostilities. In Transnistria, the Russian language is heavily favored, and Latin-script Romanian-language schools are subject to discrimination, as the Transnistrian authorities maintain that the Moldovan language should remain as it was during the Soviet period, written in the Cyrillic script. The presence of Russian troops in Transnistria is a violation of Moldovan territorial integrity, and an effective bar to any future integration into the European Union. With the exception of political advocacy on the part of those Moldovan organizations formed specifically for that purpose (such as the Moldova Foundation in Washington D.C.), Moldovans abroad have played no active part in resolving this issue.

-- (Question G) Moldovans abroad are not involved in meeting the needs of indigenous peoples outside of the majority population group.

-- (Question H) Moldovans voting abroad overwhelmingly supported non-PCRM parties in April and July elections, giving a combined 70.4 percent of their vote to the pro-west center-right Liberal and Liberal Democratic parties in April; in July, the combined total was 76.9 percent. With a peaceful transfer of power from the PCRM government to the Alliance for European Integration, it is likely that opportunities for engagement would grow significantly.

-- (Question I) The outgoing PCRM government has not demonstrated a significant amount of concern for Moldovan communities abroad, although the continued flow of remittances has contributed to the economic stability of the country.

-- (Question J) Because they are diffuse and not politically active, Post has not attempted any outreach to Moldovan diaspora communities.

-- (Question K) Post has not received any unsolicited requests from diaspora community members, apart from those requesting visa issuance for family members. These requests are handled as a routine consular matter. Several Moldovans residing in the U.S. have asked their senators and members of Congress to write to us on behalf of relatives seeking visas, demonstrating a growing political awareness of and familiarity with U.S. government operations.

-- (Question K) Post has not attempted any public diplomacy program outreach to Moldovan diaspora communities. Outreach to Moldovan communities in the U.S. could contravene the Smith-Mundt Act

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(which prohibits domestic access to information intended for foreign audiences), and Post has until now focused its attention on outreach to Moldovan citizens in Moldova.

-- (Question M) Post sees anticipated requests from the Moldovan diaspora community, apart from visa issues described in para. 18), as falling primarily in the economic and investment sphere. The knowledge-management tools and information materials most helpful to action officers at Post consist of our extant contacts in the government, financial sector, and business community.

COMMENT:

¶12. The continued existence of Moldovan migrant communities in Europe depends in large part upon the economic and political situation in Moldova. Should the economic situation at home improve, large numbers of migrants would likely return home to reunite with their children and parents. Although this outcome would affect the numbers of the Moldovan diaspora, it is also clear that some Moldovans will remain permanently outside of Moldova, as is already happening with the members of the faith-based communities in the U.S. It is unclear at present how such communities will define themselves in relation to, or apart from, their homeland.

CHAUDHRY